

Creating a Housing Stability Plan with Families Residing in Shelters and Transitional Housing

In the following months, the Family Homelessness Initiative will be outlining the next steps of the systems transformation efforts. One component of those efforts is to support family programs in aligning with Housing-Focused Services (to be provided in Strengths-Based and Tailored Services framework). This approach will be outlined in greater detail in the future Initiative efforts, however this document is intended to be an immediate resource for agencies during this transitional time between the implementation of Family Housing Connection and prior to the Initiative's next steps. (More information about these next steps will be made available in the near future.)

In the meantime, and in response to the immediate impact of Family Housing Connection on families residing in Emergency Shelters, this tool is meant to guide in developing Housing Stability Plans. While some families may continue to go on to Transitional Housing, families should begin addressing housing barriers in Emergency Shelters that will ultimately assist them in obtaining permanent housing in the future. In fact, identifying housing goals and addressing housing barriers immediately can reduce barriers to Transitional Housing for families who want and need long term housing supports or create a more direct pathway to permanent housing without having to go on to Transitional Housing. Either way, the work a family does on their housing goals in Emergency Shelter will continue on with them as they move forward. A family's Housing Stability Plan can also follow the family through subsequent programs.

While a family's Housing Stability Plan should be in place in cases when an Emergency Shelter's funding requires one (such as King County requirements in cases when families remain longer than 90 days in shelter), creating a Housing Stability Plan as soon after a family moves into a shelter is also best practice. In other words, the short term goals identified in a Housing Stability Plan that lead to the long term housing goal of identifying permanent housing can begin immediately!

If you have additional questions, please contact:

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WHO?	Who is involved in developing the Housing Stability Plan?	A Housing Stability Plan is created with a family's Case Manager and the family. The family has the primary role in establishing their housing goals. If the family is involved with multiple services (i.e. mental health services, child welfare, etc) it may be a good idea to ask the family if their other case managers can be involved in the discussion to ensure that each provider is aligned with the family's goals. The role of the case manager is to support the follow through and achievement of the goals defined in the plan.
WHAT?	What is a Housing Stability Plan?	Housing Stability Plans document all the steps both the family and the case manager(s) will take to support the family in moving towards permanent housing. The plan addresses the steps needed to build on a family's resources and addresses their housing barriers. There are clear benchmarks and timelines so that when the plan is developed, everyone knows what happens next, when things need to be done, and who is responsible for each action step. It is meant to be flexible and can adjust to account for changes in a family's circumstances.
WHERE?	Where are Housing Stability Plans created?	Housing Stability Plans are developed with families when they are residing in any form of housing that is not permanent (Emergency Shelters and Transitional Housing). The plan can follow the family as they transition to other programs and does not need to be recreated if the family enrolls in a different program. The focus of a Housing Stability Plan shifts when a family is in a Rental Assistance or Transition-in-Place Program; then the emphasis of the plan is to keep housing, not attain housing.
WHEN?	When are Housing Stability Plans created?	Immediately! It takes some time to complete the steps in an Action Plan. The sooner the work begins the better. And since the Housing Plan defines the pathway to housing, the family should capitalize on each day to work towards the long term goal of attaining permanent housing.
WHY?	Why are Housing Stability Plans Important?	Housing Plans create a clear road map for both the family and the case manager. By establishing the housing goal from the very beginning, families are immediately engaged and motivated. Breaking down the goal of housing into concrete and attainable steps provides opportunities to celebrate success and helps families feel their goals are manageable. Everyone (the client and case manager) knows who is working on what and why. It is not meant to be punitive. If a family is struggling in completing tasks, the plan should be modified to adjust for the challenges they are facing.
HOW?	How are Housing Stability Plans created?	Housing Stability Plans are developed with the family and after their Housing Assessment is completed. They reflect the client's voice and expressed goals. They include long term and short term goals. They have timelines and note who is responsible for completing each action item. Again, they can be updated or changed as needed. A strong Housing Plan supports and works with the information learned in the Housing Assessment.

What a Housing Assessment* Addresses

- ❖ Both family's strengths and challenges to get into housing
- ❖ Past housing experiences (both positive and negative)
 - Explores what works and doesn't work for a family
- ❖ Focuses on true housing barriers to understand what type of housing may be needed (families with high housing barriers should begin looking for private landlords with more flexible criteria). Housing barriers include:
 - Lack of Income
 - Criminal Backgrounds
 - Insufficient Savings for Move-In Costs
 - Lack of a Valid Form of Personal Identification
 - Housing Debt (to include debt to private landlords, housing authorities, or utilities)
- ❖ The family's credit report (using free resources as often as possible)
 - This makes sure there are no unexpected housing-related debts or evictions
 - Families can begin creating a re-payment plan with the necessary creditors (with advocacy from their case manager).
- ❖ Existing housing resources, to include:
 - Communities or neighborhoods where family support systems exist (children's schools, childcare, mental health supports, etc)
 - Communities or neighborhoods where potential employment opportunities that relate to the family's strengths exist
 - Identifying past landlords, employers, or other persons who can offer a positive reference

*Family Housing Connection will also provide a copy of each family's Housing Barrier Assessment to your program. That assessment can be the foundation to additional housing-related questions your program would like to understand or can be used as your primary assessment tool to reduce the number of times families have to respond to these types of questions.

Sample Housing Assessment

Housing History

1. Tell me about the last place you lived that worked well for you. What about that experience/housing/situation made it work well for you?
2. Have you been on a lease before? How did that end? Can you get a positive landlord reference? Have you had any past evictions?
3. Have you ever lived in public housing or Section 8 before? How did that end? Do you owe any money to a housing authority?
4. Do you know if you have any housing-related debt (past due rent, utilities, etc?) If yes, about how much?

Housing Goals

1. Where would you like to live next? Is there a neighborhood you have in mind? Is there an area where you want to avoid (due to domestic violence or recovery needs)?
2. Where do you have any friends or family? Where is your childcare set up? Your children's schools? Job options? Transportation?
3. What kind of apartment are you looking for? Do you need any special accommodations? What size unit?
4. What monthly rent are you trying to target? How much do you think you can afford each month?

Housing Challenges

1. Have you tried applying for a new lease recently? What was the outcome? What did they tell you about your application?
2. Do you have any concerns about moving back into your own place? What are they?

Other potential questions:

- What are some things relevant to your housing that you can't live without?
- What are some things relevant to your housing that are willing to forego right now?
- How far are you willing/able to travel to/from home and work?
- Are there any areas of the city you want to avoid?
- How comfortable are you looking for an apartment? What kinds of questions will you ask? Do you want someone/me to come with you when you start looking?
- How can I help you with your goals?

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What a Housing Plan Addresses

- ❖ Two to three housing goals (as described by the family):
 - Can include public housing (but should be targeted for families with the greatest barriers to increasing income).
 - *Should* include market housing in areas that work for the family and are near existing resources and communities of support; resemble past housing situations that were successful for the family; and are based on real or realistically projected budgets.*
- ❖ Long-term and short-term goals with clear timelines that move the family closer to the housing outcome they defined for themselves
 - A long-term goal towards renting an apartment may be “getting either a full-time job or two part-time jobs that will afford rent”
 - Short-term goals towards that long-term goal may be “creating a resume with my case manager, searching Craigslist every day, working with Worksource Development, accessing resources for move-in costs,” etc.
- ❖ Even before a family transitions into permanent housing, developing a Housing Stability Service Plan to address long-term housing stability:
 - Creating a housing “safety plan” that reflects realistic challenges a family can face in the future and details of what resources the family can access if needed
 - Reviewing tenant rights and responsibilities in a way the family understands
 - Helping the family to identify and connect with any resources needed to address other goals that will support long term housing stability (family mental health services, financial literacy courses, food banks, etc)

*Creating a real or estimated budget with a family is a powerful tool to begin the discussion of what rent a family can afford and/or what income the family should target to afford their future rent. This knowledge can help both in looking for housing and employment.

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Sample Housing Stability Goals

Housing Goal(s): 1-3 Permanent Housing Options Identified by the Family (Should describe type of housing, location, unit size, etc.; and should include thoughts about existing support systems, transportation, affordability, etc.)

Long-Term Goals

These are the steps that lead to attainment of the Housing Goal(s) listed above.

Employment:

Financial:

Any other:

The above goals were developed in partnership with my case manager. I understand that each goal listed above will support my efforts in securing permanent housing. I agree to work on these goals in partnership with my case manager. I will update my case manager as I complete the above goals. I will also communicate any challenges I experience and understand my case manager can offer me support as needed.

Signature of Client: _____ *Signature of CM:* _____ *Date:* _____

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Sample Housing Stability Plan

Action Items:	Who	Timeline	Complete
Housing: <u>Rent a 2 bedroom apartment in Shoreline near transit and grocery store (ideally with utilities included)</u>			
1. <u>Search Craigslist for apartments</u>	<u>Client and CM</u>	<u>Daily</u>	<u> </u>
2. <u>Find landlords with flexible criteria</u>	<u>Client and CM</u>	<u>Daily</u>	<u> </u>
3. <u>Ask my pastor for help searching</u>	<u>Client</u>	<u>Thursday</u>	<u> </u>
Employment: <u>Find a job so I can afford a 2 bedroom apartment in Shoreline</u>			
4. <u>Work with Case Manager to write out resume</u>	<u>Client</u>	<u>Tuesday</u>	<u>Y</u>
5. <u>Go to Worksource</u>	<u>Client</u>	<u>Wednesday</u>	<u> </u>
6. <u>Look at Craigslist</u>	<u>Client and CM</u>	<u>Every other day</u>	<u> </u>
Financial: <u>Get my finances in order so I can get an apartment and manage my budget better</u>			
1. <u>Pull Credit Report</u>	<u>Client and CM</u>	<u>Tuesday</u>	<u>Y</u>
2. <u>Call Creditor and Request Payment Plan</u>	<u>Client and CM</u>	<u>Friday</u>	<u> </u>
3. <u>Develop forecast budget</u>	<u>Client and CM</u>	<u>Wednesday</u>	<u> </u>
Other: <u>Miscellaneous</u>			
1. <u>Contact John Smith for a possible reference</u>	<u>Client</u>	<u>Wednesday</u>	<u> </u>
2. <u>Find childcare near Shoreline transportation route</u>	<u>Client / Ch.Care Pr.</u>	<u>Thursday</u>	<u> </u>

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3. Make referral to Program Z for move-in help CM Friday _____
4. Connect with a counselor in Shoreline Client and CM next week _____

Any Updates/Changes/Comments

The above Housing Plan was developed in partnership with my case manager. I understand that each action item listed above will support my efforts in securing permanent housing. I agree to work on this plan in partnership with my case manager. I will update my case manager as I complete the above goals. I will also communicate any challenges I experience and understand my case manager can offer me support as needed.

Signature of Client: _____ Signature of CM: _____ Date: _____